



the
leap

MIDLIFE PROGRAMME

Leap to Peru

CULTURE + COMMUNITY + MACHU PICCHU CHALLENGE

Peru *Perspective*

If you're craving a gritty challenge, and dream of seeing Machu Picchu without the crowds, this is your moment. At the heart of this 12-day adventure is a 4-day off-grid trek through hidden valleys, leading to the legendary citadel. Along the way, you'll contribute to meaningful local projects, explore hidden Inca ruins, haggle in vibrant markets, and indulge in Peru's irresistible cuisine.

LOCATION:

SACRED AND LARES VALLEY

ACCOMMODATION:

HOTELS + HOMESTAYS

Reserve your place

INFO@THELEAP.CO.UK / +44 1672 519922



The trip was beautifully organised, the homestay experience although very basic was a delight with wonderful food at every meal. The value for money was incredible and The Leap is plainly a great company – not only to deal with but also to travel with.



Contribution. Culture. Challenge.

This is no ordinary adventure.

In Peru, you'll work alongside an inspiring grassroots NGO tackling climate change in the Andes, live with local families immersed in ancient Incan culture, and take on a tough, off-grid 4-day trek to Machu Picchu—designed to push limits and stir souls.

Contribution

In Peru you will be inspired by the gorgeous Sam and her team. They run NGO 'The Andean Alliance' and are responsible for helping the high Andean communities find solutions as they adapt to climate change. Throughout your adventure you will learn about their projects and roll up your sleeves to help, firstly at their organic farm, EcoHuella, and subsequently on their high-altitude reforestation project.

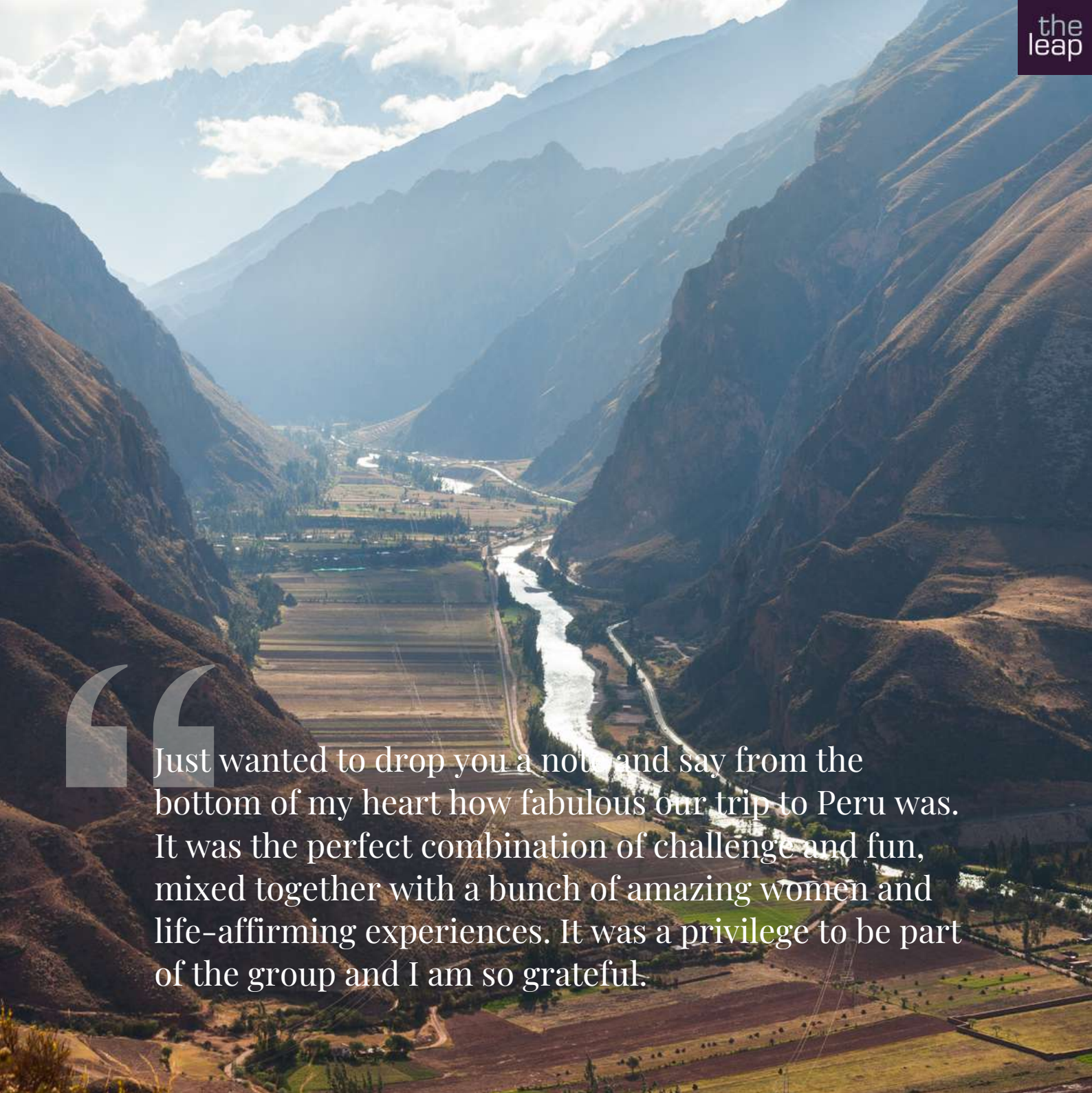
Culture

You will experience both modern day and ancient Inca culture, still ever-present throughout the Sacred Valley. You will live with local families, in home stay accommodation to experience first-hand their kindness, humour and resilience.

Challenge

The big lure of this midlife adventure is, of course, the 4-day bespoke trek to Machu Picchu. Crafted by Sam using her local knowledge, guides, and community elder friends, you will access magical mountain valleys, mystical glacial lakes and truly hospitable Andean farming families tucked away from tourists' eyes. Fret not, there will be no colour-coded t-shirts on this route. This is a thrilling challenge - and a challenge it is. Expect to be hiking for six hours a day on undulating terrain at 4000m. Leg and knee fitness is essential.





“ Just wanted to drop you a note and say from the bottom of my heart how fabulous our trip to Peru was. It was the perfect combination of challenge and fun, mixed together with a bunch of amazing women and life-affirming experiences. It was a privilege to be part of the group and I am so grateful.

Peru *Itinerary*

Day 1 Cusco to Calca

Arrival in Cusco

You will arrive in Cusco, the entry point to the Sacred Valley and be whisked away to Calca, a very pretty and colourful town, nestled amongst the mountains in the valley at 9600 ft on the Urubamba River. It is very central which makes it a great location from which to explore, and is home to the famous Mount Pituisiray – considered one of the most sacred places in the valley. You will have time to settle in and feel the warmth of hospitality from the family homestays which will become your home from home whilst on this adventure.

Day 2 Calca

EcoHuella project and acclimatisation hike

Everyone will meet at the AASD office (5 min walk from the homestays) to meet the team and learn about the projects. In short – part of AASD's objectives are to widen the variety of crops and productivity of the Andean communities. Historically, they have relied heavily on potatoes, which are now under threat as the glaciers are retreating. AASD has developed a pilot farm called EcoHuella in the Valley, where they practice new techniques and invite high Andean elders to visit and learn. They are currently introducing the greenhouse technology to these communities who are now huge producers of organic strawberries – a huge result at 4500m high.

EcoHuella is run entirely by volunteers, so, on your first morning, the plan is for you to roll up your sleeves and help with the daily jobs, such as harvesting, watering fields, preparing tree seedlings. You will have a delicious lunch, whilst watching a documentary about Julio Hanco, the now famous potato farmer, so you can further understand the challenges, and resourcefulness required to make a living in this hostile environment.

In the afternoon, you'll walk back to Calca along the River and up to the Chapel to help with your acclimatisation and to get the best views of the valley.

Peru Itinerary

Day 3 Calca

EcoHuella, acclimatisation hike and jewellery project

The day will start finishing jobs back at EcoHuella before your second acclimatisation hike along the ancient irrigation canal to explore the Caves of Urco – which is a less well-known Inca site. This is a gentle hike with stunning views.

Whilst you're at Urco, we have arranged for you to experience an inspiring community run, Youth Association Project, which teaches jewellery design and crafting skills to children of all ages. There is a gallery on-site where all the students sell their creations – receiving half of the amount paid (the other half helps fund the project). The plan is for the children to teach you how to cast a silver ring – create a few trinkets before taking to the gallery. This is a lovely community moment.



Peru *Itinerary*

Day 4 Lake of Gold

Q'engo community and reforestation

Brace yourself for this day as it is truly spectacular and will be your first experience of the breath-taking high Andes. The journey to get there will take about 1.5 hours but is so pretty as you weave your way higher and higher eventually reaching about 4000m.

The Q'engo community is an example of where AASD's greenhouse technology has been successfully integrated. They are now one the main producers of flowers and strawberries to the Sacred Valley - supplying many of the hotels and restaurants in the area. This has been life-changing for them as, you will see.

Just above their village you will be taken to the very sacred "Lake of Gold" tucked away in the barren landscape. You will be welcomed with a stunning petal ceremony, a delicious lunch, and be taught about the area - which is where the Incas fled during the Spanish invasion. It is believed that the Incas threw all their gold into the lake and to this day it remains. However, this is not all rest, after lunch you will help with AASD's reforestation project around the lake. Lots of trees need pruning and planting depending on the time of year.





A person wearing a green hat and jacket is trekking through a high-altitude mountain landscape. They are surrounded by pack animals, including horses and mules, which are carrying large, colorful striped packs. The background features rugged, snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky. The ground is a dirt path with some patches of snow.

I booked the midlife trip to Peru to fulfil an ambition to see Machu Picchu, to set myself a physical challenge by completing a high altitude trek and to have fun with like-minded people. Well the trip was an unqualified success. Owing to The Leap's association with AASD, we worked and visited indigenous communities that we would not otherwise have had access to.

Peru *Itinerary*

Day 5 Pisac

Weaving workshop

Peru is known for its stunning textiles, all beautifully hand woven, so, to get a feel for this ancient tradition you will visit friends of Sam's who live in a village called Chawaytiri, just along the valley. They have a weaving business which still uses ancient looms which require huge skill to operate. If anyone wants fabric, ponchos, belts etc - this is the place to buy it.

Pisac Ruins and Market

After lunch you will head down to Pisac to visit the amazing Inca ruin and then visit their famous market, where the Quencha communities from the surrounding highlands flock to sell their produce, gathering their supplies for the week. Another great shopping opportunity. FYI this is the place to buy the Peruvian cowboy hats.



Peru *Itinerary*

Day 6 Urubamba

Moray and Salt Mines de Maras

Today will be a peaceful day as you head back along the Vilcanota river to find the ancient site of Moray and the famous Salt Mines de Maras.

Moray is an archaeological site where some believe it was used as an experimental agricultural site to help adjust crops to different microclimates, while others consider Moray as the womb of the Earth used for spiritual ceremonies.

The salt mines are fascinating – stunning salt pools that were used 500 years before Incan times. There is little information about how the pools were built but some historians believe that the Wari civilization, pre-Inca, built the pools between 500 AD-1100 AD. Salt was important to the Incan Empire and was used in food, food preservation, livestock, and human mummification.



Peru *Itinerary*

Days 7-10 Machu Picchu 4-day trek

Leap bespoke route

Your second phase of this adventure is, of course, the journey and challenge to reach the famous Machu Picchu site, via high mountain trails and passes. We can guarantee this will be a life-enhancing moment and you will be ready for the challenge after the first phase of acclimatising. However, embarking on this pilgrimage will require a combination of stamina, determination, and a good level of fitness – but will be so worth it – I promise.

Built around 1450AD, Machu Picchu was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 and named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007. The site is at 2430m, surrounded by towering mountains, covered in lush cloud forest and home to thundering waterfalls. Utterly spectacular. Its exact former use still remains one of the world's great mysteries.





Peru *Itinerary*

Days 7 -10 Machu Picchu 4-day trek

Leap bespoke route...continued

The proposed route has been carefully crafted by AASD's local contacts, knowledgeable guides, creative cooks, and hardy mules which enables us to head off-grid to experience a unique and bespoke trek.

The first 3 days of trekking will be through the Lares Valley, visiting local communities, before catching the train which will connect us into the last day of the official Inca trail - which is the only way to access the Sun Gate. The Sun Gate is about a mile from the main site - but it provides the iconic view of Machu Picchu in its dramatic setting. The Lares area is known as the 'weavers' route' and is more remote than the traditional Inca Trail. This route will enable you to meet families who keep alive the traditions of yesteryear, and the making of Inca fabrics. They have remained unchanged over centuries.



It will be a gritty, yet awe inspiring challenge, as you wind through the hidden valleys and stunning scenery with guides and mules in tow.

Expect to be walking about 8 hours a day, at altitudes up to 4500m, following ancient paths and sleeping in a combination of tents (2 nights) and hostels (1 night). The mules carry everything and by the time you get to each campsite, the tents will be set up and a delicious meal being prepared. Food and snacks will be provided throughout the trek.



The high Andes trek was undoubtedly the toughest trek I have ever done but also the most rewarding - we did not see any other tourists. The reward of reaching the Sun Gate to Machu Picchu was truly incredible and a momentous moment of my life.



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Peru *Itinerary*

Days 7 -10 Machu Picchu 4-day trek

Leap bespoke route...continued

Day 1: Lares Valley: Quishuarani – Cuncani (3700m)

This day is a steep upward trek and steep descent over a 4200m pass to access the high Andes.

Accommodation: Camping in Cuncani

7.7 miles

Day 2: Lares Valley: Cuncani – Iskaycocha (4450m)

This day is the longest, but the gradient is more gradual than the previous day, despite walking over 2 passes at 4450m and 3750m

Accommodation: Camping in Iskaycocha, the most beautiful campsite, beside a stunning lake.

11 miles

Day 3: Lares Valley: Iskaycocha – Ollantaytambo (2792m)

This day will feel easier as it is downhill. What is lovely about this day is that the scenery changes as you move to lower altitude and walk through the trees.

Accommodation: Hostel in Ollantaytambo – picture-perfect town

10.9 miles

Day 4: Inca Trail – Sun Gate

6:00am train to km104. 8:00am Short Inca Trail. 3:00pm Sun Gate to Machu Picchu (2430m)

Accommodation: Return by train to Hostel in Ollantaytambo.

10 miles.

Peru *Itinerary*

Day 11 Cusco

San Blas + markets

Having completed your challenge you'll all travel back to Cusco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to celebrate your achievements, whilst staying our favourite hotel in the boho chic area of San Blas:

www.antiguacusco.com

Cusco was once the capital of the Inca Empire and is now known for its archaeological remains and Spanish colonial architecture. Plaza de Armas is the central square in the old city adorned with arcades, carved wooden balconies and Incan wall ruins.

San Blas is the traditional old quarter of Cusco and is the city's most picturesque district, characterised by narrow and steep streets, colonial houses built with walls of Incan stone, and amazing restaurants and shops.

Here you will have time to explore the Centro Historico, followed by a well-earned Pisco Sour, before a delicious supper and a night back under crisp cool cotton sheets, which will feel so good.

The perfect ending to an awesome adventure.



Peru *Itinerary*

Day 12 Cusco

Relax + shop + fly home

After breakfast, you'll have time to poke about the shops, before catching your flight home.



Peru *Staying & Food*

One of the most enriching aspects of this adventure is the rare opportunity to live with local Peruvian families, immersing yourself fully in their culture and daily life, providing a heartfelt connection to the people and traditions of this incredible country.

Calca

In Calca, you'll stay with our beloved host families, who have been welcoming Leapers for years. Each of you will have a cosy private room, and you'll share breakfast and dinner with your hosts, enjoying delicious, home-cooked meals. This is your chance to practice Spanish, learn about local life, and even pick up a few words of Quechua.

Gleny and Edmundo: Hosting since 2017, Gleny runs a small bodega selling fresh produce, honey, and cacao. Known for her care, she's always ready with herbal remedies for altitude sickness. Edmundo, a trusted taxi driver, ensuring everyone gets where they need to go safely. Their son, Edmundo, is studying engineering in Cusco but might be around for a chat, he comes and goes.

Maritza and Lucho: Hosting since 2012, this wonderful couple are both teachers in Calca. They'll make you feel right at home, sharing stories and teaching you Quechua phrases. Their young daughter will brighten your day, and their older sons may pop by for a visit.



Peru *Staying & Food*

Food

Get ready to embark on a culinary adventure as part of your adventure with us. All meals (3x a day) will be provided apart from when you are in Cusco for your final night.

Expect to try regional specialties with traditional dishes such as hearty soups, fresh vegetables, and locally sourced meats. For those with dietary preferences, rest assured that vegetarian and vegan options are always available.

Altitude Sickness

Cusco sits at 3400 m (11200 ft), with Calca being lower at 2,928 m (9606 ft). Symptoms of altitude sickness are common during the first few days and you may experience a mild headache, tiredness and / or loss of appetite.

Rest and patience are the best cures until acclimatized. The over-the-counter drug Diamox can be taken as a preventative a few days before your flight to Cusco.

Project *Background*



THE ANDEAN ALLIANCE FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In the breathtaking highlands of Peru, where the majestic Cusco, Sacred Valley, and Machu Picchu form the backdrop, a quiet revolution is underway. Our partners at the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development (AASD) are championing the survival of high-altitude farmers whose livelihoods face increasing threats from globalization and environmental challenges.

Founded in 2010, AASD is dedicated to empowering these resilient communities through sustainable, community-led agricultural projects. At the heart of their efforts is Ecohuella (Ecological Footprint) Farm, a unique training center co-founded by three siblings. Here, campesino farmers receive hands-on workshops and guidance tailored to their needs, all while respecting the Quechua language, traditional practices, and local learning styles.

This adventure goes beyond stunning landscapes, uncovering a story of cultural preservation and innovation. Through our partnership with AASD, you'll gain insight into the struggles and triumphs of Peru's highland farmers as they fight to sustain their way of life and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Peru *Dates & Costs 2025 & 2026*

29TH SEPTEMBER 2025	12 DAYS	£3100
10TH MAY 2026	12 DAYS	£3350
13TH SEPTEMBER 2026	12 DAYS	£3350
4TH OCTOBER 2026	12 DAYS	£3350

INCLUDED:

- Pre-departure briefing on all aspects of the adventure
- Accommodation throughout
- Airport transfers on team flight
- Food as described
- Leap T-shirt
- Chapel Hike, Urco Ruins + Youth Association Jewellery Making
- Huamanchoque community visit, Pisac and weaving workshop
- Community-led activities
- Salt Mines
- Machu Picchu Trek

NOT INCLUDED:

- International flights, travel insurance, medical expenses (reclaimable through travel insurance),
- Soft drinks/beer etc.
- Laundry fees
- The last dinner in Cusco
- Tips for the trekking staff and homestay. Budget about £100 in total.
- Private transfers to and from the airport, If you do not arrive on the main flight

A photograph of two women walking away from the camera down a paved street in a town. The woman on the left is wearing a blue jacket and maroon pants, and the woman on the right is wearing a green jacket and dark pants. They are walking past stone and plaster buildings. In the background, there are mountains under a cloudy sky. A quote is overlaid on the image.

I would not hesitate to recommend The Leap to any midlifer who wants to challenge themselves and make lifelong friends in the process.

Peru *Nitty Gritty*

What to Pack?

Clothes

Please note when packing – you are at high altitude so temperatures can get cold, especially at night.

The key message for Peru is you need lots of layers...it can go from hot to cold to rainy in a few hours.

An official kit list will be provided, accompanied with a zoom call with Milly who will run through everything.

- A selection of trousers, jeans, and shorts for the evenings and sightseeing days
- Trekking trousers
- T-shirts – long and short sleeved
- A couple of hoodies for cooler evenings
- A lightweight, gortex waterproof jacket + trousers
- A warm down jacket for the nights
- 1 pair trainers
- 1 pair of walking boots and walking socks
- 1 pair flip-flops
- 1 pair casual shoes
- Sun hat with brim
- Warm pyjamas – past volunteers slept in thermal layers on the trek

Peru *Nitty Gritty*

What to Pack?

Equipment

- Main luggage - NO hard-shell SUITCASES
- 20 litres day ruck sack
- Head torch
- Water bottle and water bladder
- Sunglasses
- Plug adapter required - they have American style plugs
- Towel/sarong
- Portable phone charger
- Ear plugs
- Cozy ugg-style slippers for home stay

Toiletries & Medical

- Basic everyday toiletries
- Sun cream/after sun
- Travel wash
- Hand sanitiser
- Insect repellent
- Antibacterial spray/cream for open wounds.
- Rehydration powders
- Savlon
- Antihistamines
- E45/Sudocream
- Immodium
- Mediplasters
- Personal Medication: Bring extra supplies, know the generic names of your medication, and ensure you can manage allergies (e.g., carry an epipen if necessary)



Peru *Nitty Gritty*

Communication

Spanish is the language of Peru, and you'll find that local people generally don't speak English, therefore it's helpful to learn a few key phrases before you arrive. We will offer translation during all planned activities and informal Spanish lessons will be available in your first week.

Your Health

Each location will have first aid on site. For more serious emergencies: Volunteers need to pay for minor medical expenses on their credit card and then reclaim these expenses back through their travel insurance. This includes the cost of the host driving a volunteer to and from hospital. In an emergency, and where evacuation by air is necessary, the insurers will settle bills directly.

Your Team

Maximum of 12 and a minimum of 6 volunteers per departure. The programme cannot run with fewer than this. 5 to 6 weeks prior to departure, if the minimum group size hasn't been met, you will be offered an alternative placement or a postponement, depending on availability and preference. Anyone aged 18- 22 can participate.

Money

Sol is the local currency. ATMs in Calca and Cusco. Note that Calca and area communities are almost entirely cash-based economies so don't plan on using a card (besides at ATMs).

Peru *Nitty Gritty*

Managing Expectations

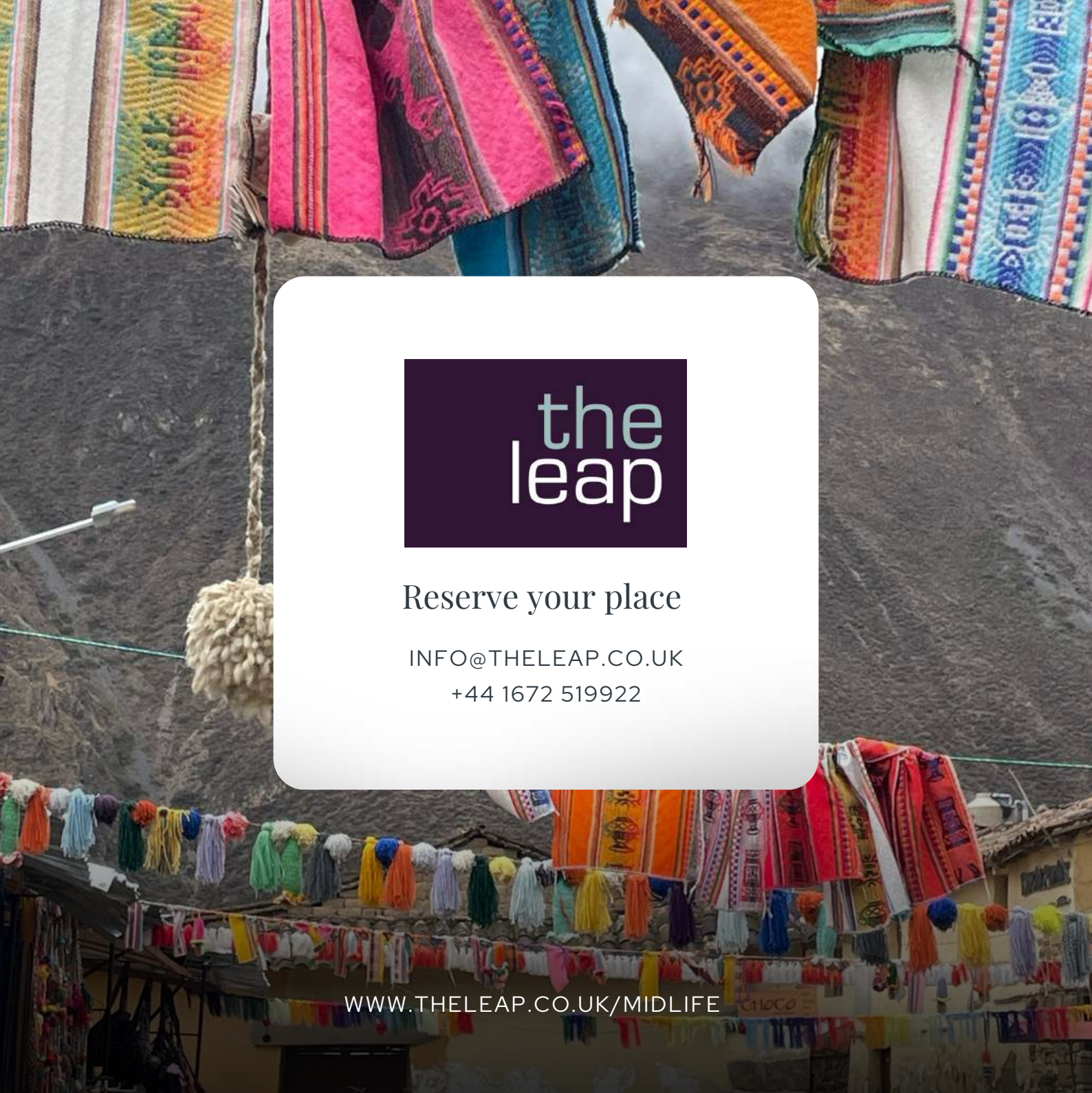
We do our best to describe our programme as accurately as we can so that you have realistic expectations. It's important that you read this document carefully, and listen to the pre-departure zoom, so you are fully prepared with what lies ahead. Please remain flexible, as tasks and projects may change, depending on the needs of the communities, projects on the ground and weather.

Your Safety

We prioritise safety in our gap year programmes through detailed risk assessments, safety audits, and adherence to industry standards such as BS8848, Trading Standards, the Year Out Group, and the Gap Year Association. On arrival, teams receive thorough safety briefings and are provided with secure accommodation, risk-assessed vehicles, medical evacuation access, and reliable emergency communications. Professional medics and healthcare support ensure swift resolution of emergencies. Our destinations are rigorously assessed for safety, and detailed audits are available upon request. These measures ensure participants experience enriching adventures with the highest levels of safety and risk management.

Accreditations

We're a member of the Year Out Group and the first UK company accredited by the Gap Year Association. Our safety procedures follow the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 'Know Before You Go' advice. Your money is financially protected through IPP London, and flights are booked via Trailfinders.



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